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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 000398

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EB/EPPD/PD
PASS USTR FOR PADILLA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/31/2013
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [IT](#) [KPAO](#) [TBIO](#) [EUN](#)
SUBJECT: WTO BIOTECH PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN ITALY

REF: SECSTATE 21881

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CLASSIFIED BY: EMIL SKODON, DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION, FOR REASONS
1.5 (D) AND (E).

1. (U) PA ITALY HAS FOCUSED CONSIDERABLE RESOURCES ON BIOTECH ISSUES OVER THE PAST YEAR, SPONSORING SPEAKER PROGRAMS, DVCS, ROUNDTABLES, SEMINARS, INTERNATIONAL AND VOLUNTARY VISITOR PROJECTS, PRESS INTERVIEWS, OP-ED PIECES, AND OTHER PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ACTIVITIES DESIGNED TO PROMOTE U.S. BIOTECH INTERESTS IN ITALY. THIS IS ONE OF OUR HIGHEST PRIORITIES, AND WE HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN TRANSMITTING OUR MESSAGE TO ITALIAN POLICY MAKERS AND OPINION LEADERS.

2. (C) WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT GIVEN THE CURRENT CRISIS IN IRAQ, IT WILL BE UNTIMELY TO MOUNT A HIGH PROFILE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY CAMPAIGN IN ITALY TO PROMOTE A WTO CASE AGAINST THE EUROPEAN UNION OVER ITS MORATORIUM ON APPROVALS OF BIOTECH FOOD PRODUCTS. THE BULK OF OUR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY EFFORT IN THE WEEKS AND MONTHS TO COME MUST FOCUS ON PROMOTING U.S. POLICY IN IRAQ AND GAINING ITALIAN PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR IT. WE ARE CONCERNED THAT IF WE ARE ENGAGED IN THIS EFFORT AT THE SAME TIME THAT WE ARE PUBLICLY PROMOTING LEGAL ACTION AGAINST THE EUROPEAN UNION OVER BIOTECH FOOD PRODUCTS (A VERY SENSITIVE ISSUE IN ITALY), WE COULD JEOPARDIZE OUR ABILITY TO INCREASE ITALIAN PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR OUR ACTIONS IN IRAQ. WHILE U.S. IRAQ POLICY AND U.S. BIOTECH FOOD POLICY ARE NOT LOGICALLY RELATED, OUR EXPERIENCE IS THAT THE ITALIAN PRESS AND PUBLIC WILL MAKE A CONNECTION THAT COULD BE TO THE DETRIMENT OF OUR EFFORTS AT THIS CRITICAL TIME. WE SHOULD SEEK TO SLAY ONLY ONE DRAGON AT A TIME.

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3. (C) WE SHOULD THEREFORE PROCEED INCREMENTALLY IN OUR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT THE USG CASE IN THE WTO AGAINST THE EUROPEAN UNION OVER THE MORATORIUM; WE SHOULD TARGET SPECIFIC POLICY MAKERS AND OPINION LEADERS FIRST, RATHER THAN THE GENERAL PUBLIC. THE MOST EFFECTIVE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY CAMPAIGN FOR SUCH A TARGETED AUDIENCE WOULD FOCUS AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE ON THE LEGAL BASIS OF THE USG CASE, I.E., ON THE ILLEGAL NATURE OF THE MORATORIUM. THUS THE FIRST TWO OF THE SEVEN BROAD MESSAGES OUTLINED IN REFTTEL WOULD BE THE MOST USEFUL IN ITALY IN THE NEAR TERM: THAT THE MORATORIUM ON APPROVALS OF BIOTECH FOOD PRODUCTS VIOLATES COMMITMENTS MADE BY THE EU IN THE WTO; AND THAT THE U.S. IS SIMPLY SEEKING SCIENTIFIC, RULES-BASED REVIEW OF APPLICATIONS, NOT FORCING ACCEPTANCE OF BIOTECH FOODS ON EUROPEAN CONSUMERS. WE KNOW ITALIAN POLICY MAKERS AND OPINION LEADERS ("VALIDATORS") WHO WOULD SUPPORT US IN THESE ARGUMENTS.

4. (C) THE REMAINING FIVE BROAD MESSAGES (PARAGRAPH 3C-G IN REFTTEL), FOCUSING ON WHAT SOME ITALIAN OPINION LEADERS REGARD AS SUBSIDIARY ISSUES, WOULD BE MUCH LESS EFFECTIVE WITH THAT AUDIENCE. WE WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTY IDENTIFYING INFLUENTIAL ITALIAN "VALIDATORS" TO SUPPORT THEM AND WE ARE THEREFORE INCLINED TO USE THEM SPARINGLY IN OUR TARGETED PUBLIC DIPLOMACY CAMPAIGN. WHEN THE HEAT IS OFF THE IRAQ CRISIS AND WE CAN USEFULLY RESUME A BROADER-BASED PUBLIC DIPLOMACY CAMPAIGN, ISSUE C (FAMINE IN AFRICA) HAS PARTICULAR RESONANCE WITH ITALIAN POLITICAL LEADERS AND THE PUBLIC. PM BERLUSCONI HAS EXPRESSED PERSONAL INTEREST IN THIS THEME TO OUR AMBASSADORS TO ITALY, THE VATICAN, AND THE FAO.

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5. (U) WE ARE CURRENTLY IDENTIFYING ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR A BIOTECH VOLUNTARY VISITOR PROGRAM AND WOULD WELCOME FUNDING FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF APPROXIMATELY \$25,000 TO ALLOW TEN PARLIAMENTARIANS TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROGRAM. WE WILL ALSO ORGANIZE WITHIN TWO MONTHS U.S. SPEAKER PROGRAMS IN MILAN, NAPLES, AND ROME IN SUPPORT OF U.S. BIOTECH POLICY. WE WOULD EAGERLY ACCEPT DVCS WITH HIGH-LEVEL USG OFFICIALS (SUCH AS USTR ZOELLICK AND U/S LARSON) AS SOON AS A DECISION IS MADE TO PROCEED WITH THE WTO CASE.
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